

Name: _____ Date: _____ Period: _____

Althea Gibson, Tennis Player



No matter what accomplishments you make, somebody helped you.

Althea Gibson was born on August 25, 1927 in South Carolina. Wanting a better life for their family, the Gibsons moved to Harlem, New York in 1930.

Althea Gibson had a difficult life. The family was on public assistance and didn't have much money. Althea struggled in school. But the one bright spot in her life was sports. Althea was able to play organized sports in her neighborhood. The Police Athletic League shut down a street in Harlem and used the space to teach children different sports.

Althea's favorite sport was paddle ball. Paddle ball is a game similar to tennis, but the racquet is solid. In 1939, when Althea was only twelve years old, she won the New York City Women's Paddle Tennis Championship.

The people in Althea's neighborhood saw that she had talent and they wanted to encourage it. So the neighbors gathered donations for Althea so she could purchase a junior membership to the Cosmopolitan Tennis Club in Harlem. This was a tennis club for African Americans. Althea quickly adapted, or adjusted to playing tennis. She began playing in tennis tournaments. In 1944 and 1945, Althea won the American Tennis Association's New York State Championship in the girls' division. In 1946, Althea began playing in the women's division. Beginning in 1947, Gibson won the American Tennis Association Championship ten times.

Althea Gibson was so good at tennis that she earned a scholarship to go to college. She attended Florida A & M University. After graduating, she took a job as a physical education teacher in Missouri.

Gibson wanted to continue playing tennis in championships. Unfortunately, the world of tennis was still segregated, or separated. This meant that Althea could only play in black championships. This changed in 1950. Gibson was invited to play in the United States National Competition, which is now known as the U.S. Open. The following year, Gibson became the first black tennis player to play at Wimbledon.

Gibson worked hard on the game of tennis. In 1957 she became the first black woman to win the Wimbledon. She also won the U.S. Championship that year. In 1958, Althea won both of these competitions again. At the end of the year, Althea left tournament tennis because she needed to earn money. At the time tournament tennis did not pay winners.

Althea went on to record an album of songs and appear in a movie with the famous actor, John Wayne. But she loved competing in sports. This was where she was the strongest and happiest.

In 1964, Althea Gibson made history again. She became the first black woman to join the LPGA--the Ladies Professional Golfing Association. Once again, Althea had to deal with segregation and racism. Many golf courses would not let her use the clubhouse or restrooms. She often had to change her clothes in her car. Althea played in the LPA until 1977. Although Althea was a much better tennis player than golfer, she still made a little over \$19,000 in tournament play.

Althea Gibson died in 2003 at the age of 76.

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1. The author states, “But she loved competing in sports. This was where she was the strongest and happiest.” What text evidence supports this statement?

2. Explain how you know that Althea Gibson enjoyed trying new activities. Use text evidence to support your answer.

3. Summarize Althea’s childhood in 3-5 sentences.

4. What detail in the text connects with Althea’s quote, “No matter what accomplishments you make, somebody helped you”? Explain.
